853 A child is nursed for two or even three years, and theoretically, a woman should abstain from sexual intercourse throughout this period. In practice, however, the period of three months mentioned above is the limit of such abstention.

854 Childhood. While he is small, the child remains with his mother, whether she cares for him herself, has him cared for by a slave especially designated for the duty, or turns him over to one of her daughters.

During the nursing period of two or even three years, he is carried astraddle by his mother or some other person entrusted with his care until his legs are strong enough for him to run about the house and its vicinity.

857 At about six or eight years old, he is drawn into the juvenile organization known as n-tomo, and he never fails to join it as soon as he is welcome. Little girls are less free; they are kept at home and put to work at household duties, such as bringing water and wood and watching the fire.

881 Puberty. As we shall see, the n-tomo prepares the child for the soli, a ceremony which marks the most important event of his life, civil puberty. The essential but not the only rite involved in this ceremony is circumcision. In principle, the soli is limited to pubescent boys and this implies that all who go through the ceremony have physically reached puberty. Aside from the fact, however, that this condition is reached at differing ages, the boys who undergo the ceremony differ in age because the soli does not take place every year, owing to the considerable expense involved.

● 882 When the soli is behind him, a boy is no longer a child; he is not exactly a man either, but rather is a "young master," a kamalen'. Since he is admitted to the brotherhoods, apparently his discretion can be counted on, and he is considered competent to take an oath so he can be called upon to testify in a dispute. Also, if he is enterprising enough to attract attention to himself, he is given trifling missions which inspire him to persevere. Furthermore, since by now he has been made sophisticated by his companions in the n-tomo, his relations with his female companion

882 836

882 in the [216] soli, the n-golo-moso, and with other girl friends [836] are not merely platonic; indeed, sexual licentiousness is common.

As in everything else, a girl's life is more restricted. For her, the soli is merely a way of being presented to society, as we would say, that is, a means of attracting a prospective husband.

884 Coming-of-age, guardianship, deprivation of civil rights. It is obvious from the above that a Bambara has no way of knowing his age with any certainty. At best, he can estimate it by referring to some important event known to have occurred at about the time of his birth.

Since this is the case, we can see that coming-of-age has no correlation with chronological age. The individual's physical development and, still more, his intellectual maturity are signs that lead his family to grant a kamalen' the rights that distinguish a man from a boy. The most important of these rights is assuredly that of taking a wife and founding a family.

As a matter of fact, the soli marks the point after which the young people of both sexes are deemed competent to contract [582] marriages. Indeed, girls of 16 or 18 years of age and boys over 25 are rarely unmarried. It should further be understood that a girl may be betrothed at birth or even when she is being carried in the womb, as has been explained above.

429 562 Guardianship is intended to protect the individual from the follies of inexperience and the natural weakness of the female sex, a weakness to be understood here to include not only actual lack of physical strength but also incompetence imposed by custom which forbids a woman any power whatever over community rights or property. This is why young men are subject to guardianship until the fa, in council, recognizes their right to exercise the prerogatives of man's estate. In principle, women are subject to guardianship throughout their lives.

429 During his married life, the father is the legal administrator of any properties coming to his minor children, and he usually employs such property with discretion since he is legally bound to render an account when the children reach their majority.

521 831 864 and before little girls, and it is not unusual to see a big girl leaning against the door of the hut with ears wide open so as not to miss a word, and finding cause to burst into gales of laughter. Are all these people capable of being shocked? I doubt it, even as far as the young girls are concerned, for all or almost all of them have their favorite nooks in the bush. Moreover, they can tell each other vulgar stories, and one should hear them as they clean and spin cotton, or when in the evening, shut in a communal hut (1), they play, laugh, and

[591 882]

1. In the evening all young girls are shut in a communal hut or dormitory under the supervision of an old woman. The woman's duty is to prevent young men from coming in and to see that the girls do not go out and seek a boy friend's hospitality. There is a dormitory in each quarter.

chatter before going to sleep. Could it be otherwise? Since all the men have soungourou, they know that their fathers and brothers each have one, and they are not unaware that their mothers see no /160/ wrong in giving themselves to their men friends. The great crime is allowing oneself to be caught.

521 831 You may think I exaggerate, yet when two women, each with a nursing infant in her arms, are crouched in the court by their pots in which tô (gruel) is simmering, it is very unusual for them not to be gossiping about the marital infidelities of their neighbors and sometimes even their own. I am saying nothing about the old women with turned-up chins and toothless jaws; they are experienced midwives and talk mainly about abortions.

They are all the same, and more than one mother has made me blush as she gave the breast to her last born and smiled sweetly at the rest of the brood frolicking near her. In wishing health and prosperity to a child that a woman is nursing, one sometimes makes a mistake about its sex, and without respect for one's ears nor pity for